**National Environmental Information Exchange Network Grant Program
Frequently Asked Questions**

General Questions:

Q *What is the National Environmental Information Exchange Network Grant Program?*

A The National Environmental Information Exchange Grant Program serves to advance the National Environmental Information Exchange Network by encouraging State and other partner's data integration efforts. Funding will be provided through grants to States, the District of Columbia, Trust Territories, and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes for capacity building capabilities for Network participation.

Q *What are the pieces of the State grant program, and how will the $25.0 million appropriated for this program be spent?*

A Grant guidance was developed over the summer time frame in consultation with State and Tribal Partners. EPA announced the solicitation for applications for this program in early February and proposals were due April 1.

The State grant program helps EPA, States and other partners exchange environmental information and use consistent data. It will focus on data standards, integration, and exchange technology. While not focused on any specific environmental program, the availability of both State and EPA data on the Network will facilitate understanding of various environmental issues, and serve as a precursor to understanding what data needs exist in order to more fully understand environmental conditions. EPA envisions that this grant program will need multiple year funding to accomplish the implementation of the Exchange Network.

The Network Grant Program has four main parts which are: 1) Network One Stop Grants; 2) Network Readiness Grants; 3) Network Challenge Grants; and 4) Network Administration Grants.

1) **Network One Stop Grants** build upon the foundation the One Stop Program helped to create. States and Tribes with some strategic planning concerning how they might participate in the Exchange Network, and who have not received a One Stop Grant, are eligible to receive funding.

2) **Network Readiness Grants** enhance State and Tribal capacity and foster Network participation (e.g., development of a node, assignment of data stewardship roles and responsibility, establishment of trading partner agreements, and internal data cleanup).

3) **Network Challenge Grants** are available to any group of eligible applicants to work collaboratively on a project that will be advancing the Exchange Network. Projects should demonstrate how they will produce a higher level of quality data, reduce reporting burden, and provide public access to the data.

4) **Network Administration Grant**. This grant supports State/Tribal technical and administrative functions of the Network.

Q *How many States and Tribes received grants and what kinds?*

A A total of 82 States, Territories, and Tribes received grants in 2002. Breakdown is as follows:

TOTAL ONE STOP GRANTS:	**18**	**$5,393,202**
One Stop States: 9		
One Stop Tribes: 9		
TOTAL READINESS GRANTS:	**41**	**$12,187,267**
Readiness States/Territories: 36		
Readiness Tribes: 5		
TOTAL CHALLENGE GRANTS:	**23**	**$5,916,347**
Challenge States: 20*		
Challenge Tribes: 3		

* Reflects 5 lead States <u>and</u> 15 partnership States. Does <u>not</u> include 5 States partnering with Michigan but not receiving separate grants.

TOTAL NETWORK ADMINISTRATION GRANT:	**1**	**$1,500,000**
Environmental Council of States: 1		
TOTAL 2002 GRANTS:	**83**	
TOTAL FUNDED:		**$24,996,816**

Q What types of projects are States and Tribes proposing?

A Following is a short description of proposals for One Stop, Readiness and Challenge grants:

- **One Stop -** These grants stimulate a partnership with applicants who have decided to undertake a comprehensive re-engineering of their information management process in order to reduce the burden of environmental reporting on the regulated community, integrate agency data and data management processes across program and organizational lines, and improve public access to environmental information. A typical example is Kentucky's proposal to develop a One Stop web portal providing on-line permitting and reporting capabilities to the regulated community. Kentucky has already invested approximately $12M toward infrastructure improvements (including an integrated environmental management system, or IEMS) that will allow full-scale implementation of the goals set forth in their application. They will now use the grant to plan, design, and implement a public access node for on-line permitting and reporting and to allow Internet-based access to integrated environmental information stored in the IEMS.

- **Readiness -** These grants assist States and Tribes in addressing priority internal information technology investments while constructing initial linkages to the Network. Grants must be used to advance the quality and availability of environmental data and to produce a material advancement in one or more of the Network's components (Trading Partner Agreements, Data Standards, Data Exchange Templates, technical infrastructure, etc). Grantees must be committed to participate in the Network and actual development of a node or portal on the Network.

  Forty-one Readiness grants were funded in 2002. Proposals provided a comprehensive three-year transition plan that addresses steps and milestones toward full participation on the Network. While applicants were not restricted to using EPA's Central Data Exchange (CDX) data flow priorities, they were strongly encouraged to align proposals with EPA's proposed schedule. Transition plans were required to clearly identify core capacity building functions to be completed under the grant. These include: establishment of an official information source and steward; development of technical infrastructure for Internet node operation; connection of information resources to the node; node implementation; and node trading partner agreements.

- **Challenge -** These grants support single State/Tribe or multi-State/Tribe collaborative efforts to advance the Network's development and implementation and create benefits for multiple States/Tribes. An example of collaborative efforts in the 2002 program is New Jersey's Beach Water Quality Data Exchange Network proposal. The grant will advance the functionality of the Network by demonstrating immediate data flows of water quality monitoring information, health risk determinations and beach closure occurrences between local and State agency partners (Delaware, North Carolina, Georgia, New Jersey, California, the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Foundation and the Earth 911 Information Network) and the EPA. Implementation of the New Jersey project will produce a turn-key system that can easily be customized and replicated by other States and local agencies.

Q *How much of the funding is set-aside for Tribes?*

A $2.5 million.

Q *Can grant funds awarded be used to hire temporary employees to support the project?*

A Yes.

Specific Network One Stop Questions:

Q *Is the State grant program in addition to the One Stop program?*

A No. However, the basic component of the Exchange Network grant program will be built upon the foundation the One Stop Program helped to create.

Specific Network Readiness Questions:

Q *Are grant proposals limited to addressing data flow identified on the EPA's Central Data Exchange (CDX) priority list?*

A Ideally, the State/Tribal three-year transition plan would align with CDX data flow priorities. Grant proposals are not restricted to proposed CDX data flows, but applicants are strongly encouraged to align their proposal with EPA's proposed schedule. For the most current information on CDX flow priorities and status, please refer to the CDX web site: http://www.epa.gov/cdx/priority.html.

Q *Can a Network Node be developed within just one department using one source of data (i.e, Air, Water, Waste)?*

A At least one source of data in a mature stage of production that is used for agency business and that would likely be used within the Network is originally envisioned. However, longer term use would ultimately include all environmental program data for exchange.

Specific Network Challenge Questions:

Q *Can grant award funds be distributed directly to individual States involved in a joint Challenge proposal?*

A Funds can be awarded to individual States. However, to ensure success of the joint project, the Lead State Agency submitting the proposal must be responsible for ensuring that each State completes the work identified in the work plan submitted with the proposal.

Specific Questions about the Network:

Q *What is the National Environmental Information Exchange Network (NEIEN)?*

A The National Environmental Information Exchange Network (the "Network") is a new approach for exchanging environmental data between EPA, States, and other partners that uses the Internet and standardized data formats. The Network will facilitate the exchange of data between participating partners, using the Internet (and Internet-based protocols) and standardized data exchange formats. It is a voluntary, flexible, and secure Network that enables EPA, States, and other partners to address the environmental challenges of the future.

Q *Why is it important to create this Network?*

A The Network will improve the quality of environmental data, make the flows of data between States, Tribes, Territories and other partners more efficient, reduce reporting burden, and improve access to environmental data. Perhaps most importantly, this approach will provide secured flows of high quality data that can be used to measure environmental results. As Agencies move toward performance and indicator-based management approaches, the Network will provide the critical infrastructure to provide transparency and accountability.

Q *What is a Network Node?*

A A node includes the hardware and software used to exchange environmental information on the Network, using a standard protocol and appropriate security measures to issue and respond to authorized requests for specific information. It is an environmental information Web service that processes authorized queries and sends the requested information in an XML (Extensible Mark-up Language).

Q *Who authorizes the Network?*

A The Network will be created through a web of Trading Partner Agreements (TPAs) and core infrastructure components between its members. EPA is hopeful that States and other partners will authorize individual flows that are designated in TPAs as "official" data flows and in doing so "authorize" the Network. EPA also hopes that States and other partners will officially express their interest, desire and investments in the development of the Network.

Q *Are e-commerce tools like XML and TPA's really applicable or practical for environmental agencies?*

A Tools and technologies being developed and rapidly embraced by the private sector can be applied to the business of environmental agencies. Much of this technology enables the rapid, secure and economical formatting and transmission of data between entities, leveraged through tools like XML and e-commerce servers. Current analysis suggests that in most cases, States and EPA can apply simplified (leading edge, but not cutting edge) versions of the more mature technologies directly to their data. The market place is developing tools to securely clear thousands of e-commerce transactions an hour between thousands of trading partners.

Q *What will be the role of EPA Regions in the Network?*

A The role of EPA Regions is discussed at length in the Network Blueprint document developed by EPA. Because the Network relies on TPAs executed between partners, the Blueprint envisions that EPA Regions will assume this role. In addition, EPA Regions will then use these TPAs as the basis for monitoring the quality and availability of the data flows. In addition, EPA Regions may facilitate the negotiations of multi-State/party, geographically-specific TPAs and flows.